

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 3 - HOMELESSNESS (PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)

Thursday, 22 September 2016

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Zoe Smith (Chair), Councillor Terrie Eales (Deputy Chair); Councillors Rufia Ashraf, Aziz, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy and Elizabeth Gowen

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Pete Smith, Head of Partnerships, HomelessLink

Witnesses Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Community Safety
Councillor Stephen Hibbert, Cabinet Member for Housing
Emma Forbes, Housing Options and Advice Manager
Sergeant Simon Pinchin, Northants Police
Sergeant Julie Parsons, ASB Unit

Officers Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sally Beardsworth, Muna Cali, Cathrine Russell and Samuel Shaw. The Chair advised that due to conflicting priorities Councillor Phil Larratt had decided to step down from the membership of this Scrutiny Panel.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

3. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2016 as a true and accurate record.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A) CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY, CHAIR, CSP, COMMUNITY SAFETY MANAGER

Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, presented the written response to the core questions; highlighting the salient points.

Councillor Hallam was thanked for their comprehensive response.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

(B) CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND HOUSING OPTIONS AND ADVICE MANAGER, NBC

Councillor Stephen Hibbert, Cabinet Member for Housing, and Emma Forbes, Housing Options and Advice Manager, presented the written response to the core questions; highlighting the salient points.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Copies of the countywide Care Leavers Protocol were circulated. It was highlighted that this Protocol is not working as it should be as some Agencies need to be committed to the Programme six months earlier than they currently are. Young people should leave care in a planned way. The Social Worker should acknowledge when the young person is ready to leave care to independent living. It was felt that currently young people do not have this support.
- Housing Options and Advice is very keen on partnership working and has co-ordinated the Rough Sleepers count and Strategy.
- The Scrutiny Panel heard that homelessness can happen to anyone and an individual does not have to be roofless to be homeless. The key reasons for homelessness were emphasised.
- Homelessness can be damaging on people's health and wellbeing. Help and assistance is available from a number of Agencies.
- Work is ongoing regarding the Change Lives Strategy.
- A homelessness review will be undertaken next year.
- Severe weather provision for rough sleepers will be provided at the night shelter.
- Intervention from the rough sleepers count works well and another is planned in November.
- A couple of rough sleepers are difficult to engage with and do not want to stop sleeping rough. Work is ongoing with the Police and Immigration.
- When the Social Lettings Agency is up and running it will offer options for customers. The Empty Homes officer will work with landlords.
- In response to a query, the Scrutiny Panel was informed that a lot of people have been asked to leave private rented properties for various reasons. The validity of Section 21 Notices are always checked.
- In answer to a question, the Scrutiny Panel was advised that the causes of homelessness are always checked. Equality monitoring always takes place.

- There has been a rise in bed and breakfast accommodation and temporary accommodation. A review will be undertaken. It is expected that the Social Lettings Agency will help. Fewer lets are available. The Housing Allocations Policy is being reviewed.
- It was noted that not all Beggars are homeless.

Councillor Hibbert and Emma Forbes were thanked for providing a comprehensive response to the core questions.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

(C) HEAD OF PROTECTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE, NORTHANTS POLICE

Sergeant Simon Pinchin, Northants Police, presented the written response to the core questions; highlighting the salient points.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- In response to a query regarding ASB in respect of rough sleepers, Sergeant Pinchin advised that this only applies to some of them. He acknowledged that there is some confusion regarding beggars and rough sleepers. A Beggars Strategy has been produced. If there is ASB the Police liaises with the Anti Social Behaviour Unit.
- The Scrutiny Panel heard that there are a couple of very vulnerable rough sleepers who are proving difficult to place. They have mental health issues along with drug and alcohol dependency. The Police has a good relationship with the rough sleepers.
- The Police often act as intelligence gathers.
- In respect of new legislation, some Eastern Europeans are not exercising their Treaty Rights.
- Phil Harris confirmed that the Police is instrumental in the Multi-Agency Strategy and the Council's vision for tackling rough sleepers is embraced by the Police.

Sergeant Pinchin was thanked for their comprehensive response.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

(D) CASE MANAGER, ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UNIT

Police Sergeant Julie Parsons, Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, presented the written response to the core questions; highlighting the salient points.

The Scrutiny Panel made comment, asked questions and heard:

- All rough sleepers are categorised as vulnerable.

- The ASB Unit embraces the work of other Agencies; there is a partnership approach.
- The Unit does not criminalise for rough sleepers but can use its powers; there is an holistic approach.
- People can only be detained for criminal reasons.
- In response to a query, the Scrutiny Panel was advised that often individuals with mental health problems have issues with Authority and have poor social skills; they often don't want to stop taking drugs/alcohol.
- There has been an increase in people being discharged from hospital. Some work has been undertaken with the hospitals and there is a need for a Plan to be introduced and for people to have somewhere available to stay when Housing Services are aware that they are being discharged.

Julie Parsons was thanked for her comprehensive response.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

(E) DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SERVICES, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Scrutiny Panel received a written paper from the Director, Children's Services, Northamptonshire County Council.

The Scrutiny Panel felt it would be advantageous for the Director, Children's Services, Northamptonshire County Council, to attend a future meeting of the Panel to answer further questions in particular around:

- Your perspective around the Care Leavers' Strategy and other such Strategies on how these Strategies are currently working
- What is being done to follow the objectives contained within the Strategies and how Children's Services monitors what action needs to be taken to increase the success of care leavers
- The Results of the Multi Agency Case Audit

The input from the Director, Children's Services, Northamptonshire County Council, would be useful in further informing the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

AGREED: (1) That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.
(2) That the Director, Children's Services, Northamptonshire County Council, is asked to attend a future meeting of this Scrutiny Panel.

(F) HEAD OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS, LGSS

The Scrutiny Panel received a written paper from the Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS.

The Scrutiny Panel noted that the relationship between Housing and Wellbeing and Revenues and Benefits was very good. Information is shared.

In answer to a query regarding Universal Credit (UC); the Scrutiny Panel was advised that contact needs to be made with the Department of Work and Pensions.

In response to a query whether UC had impacted on homelessness; the Scrutiny Panel heard that this was not currently showing as an issue.

AGREED: That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

The meeting concluded at 7:22 pm